Los Gatos Bridge Hanging

By John Pusateri

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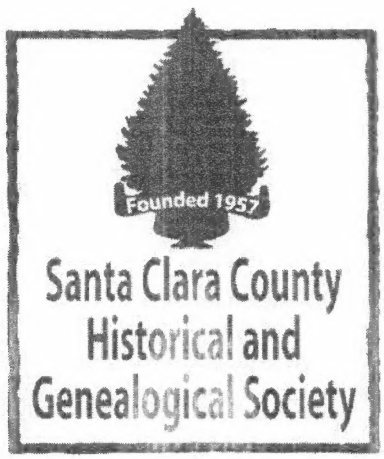
Notes:

- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara Historical and Genealogical Society



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LOS GATOS BRIDGE HANGING

In 1887 the town of Los Gatos, now one of the most peaceful and law-abiding on the coast, was aroused to a white heat of indignation and resentment by a murder committed on its main street. This came about when two Mexicans quarreled and got into a fight. One of them, Encarnacion Garcia, getting the worst of the fray, backed away, pulled out a long knife and began to carve the other. Garcia did not stop until his foe lay dead at his feet. A mob of citizens gathered about the scene. So angered were they at what they saw that they started chasing the murdered immediately.

Seized and overcome, Garcia was carried toward the bridge over the Los Gatos creek. Apparently sensing his doom, he struggled desperately, but to no avail. He was taken to the east center, highest point from the stream's bed, and without ceremony hanged from the bridge.

It was reported at the time that Charles Goslaw, a citizen of Los Gatos, threw the loop of the rope over the murderer's neck. And it was the same inflamed public sentiment which doomed Garcia that operated disastrously in the case of Goslaw sometime later.

Not long after the tragedy, Goslaw, who was a house-mover, went to San Jose, leaving his house-moving tools in charge of an old man named H. A. Grant. He returned in an intoxicated condition to find that Grant, without permission to do so, had moved the tools to another part of the town. Goslaw became furiously angry. He swore that he would find Grant and give him a sound beating. After taking a few more drinks to brace him up he went to Grant's cabin and assaulted the old man. Grant was physically his inferior. Goslaw handed him

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a severe beating, and left him on the floor, bruised and helpless.

Goslaw, on leaving the cabin, went to the constable and asked to be arrested for battery. He was put in jail, and shortly afterward was allowed to go on his own recognizance. Several days later Grant died. Then it was that outraged Los Gatos cried for vengeance. Goslaw was rearrested. He was tried in the Superior Court in San Jose for murder and, having no attorney, the court appointed a young man who had just been admitted to the bar. Thus handicapped, Goslaw did not have a chance. The jury found him guilty of murder in the first degree and the death sentence was imposed. Without money and lacking powerful friends, Goslaw was unable to take further steps that might have saved him.

The night preceding the execution some of his friends visited him in his cell at the County Jail and plied Goslaw with liquor, which he was quite willing to drink. When the time of his execution came he could neither stand on his feet nor understand what the sheriff wanted. In that condition he met his death, the persons responsible for this condition not regretting their work.

The Los Gatos bridge was reconstructed in 1905, but is located at the same spot as when Garcia was hung. The creek is approximately one hundred and twenty-five feet wide and about thirty feet deep at this point. To reach it one must follow Main street west, then northwesterly until reaching the bridge. A. Green Drugstore, 11 Main street, stands on the southeast side, and the Foothill Hotel, 16 Main street, stands on the northeast side.

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LOS GATOS BRIDGE HANGING (Continued)

Mrs. Pierce, 304 Main street, Los Gatos, an eye witness to the bridge hanging, is still alive. She is past seventy years old.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: History of Santa Clara County - Eugene T. Sawyer

CONSULTANTS: Mrs. Pierce, 304 Main street, Los Gatos